DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 879 CG 017 134

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TITLE Counseling High School Students for Their Individual Learning Styles.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 19p.; Best copy available.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Development; *Cognitive Style; Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Role; High Schools; *High School Students; *Individual Differences; Learning Strategies; School Counseling

ABSTRACT

Counseling may be developmental, preventive or crisis-oriented. Counselors using a developmental approach to school counseling recognize that human development is characterized by stages containing different psychosocial crises and different developmental tasks. High school students are predominantly in the early adolescent stage, characterized by rapid physical changes, significant conceptual maturity, and a heightened sensitivity to peer approval. During this stage it is essential that educators diagnose individual learning styles and generate an educational environment that provides for varied learning styles. Traditionally, diagnosis has been viewed as an important counseling function. A thorough knowledge of the student's individual learning style can facilitate the diagnostic process in counseling. Learning style is the manner in which elements from five basic stimuli (environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological) affect a person's ability to perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. Research suggests that matching teaching styles and counseling techniques to students' learning styles can lead to improved student achievement and attitudes. In addition to developing a counseling program that is responsive to individual learning styles, the school counselor should function as a consultant to teachers, parents and administrators regarding learning styles. (JAC)

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COUNSELING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES

1983

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CG 017134

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COUNSELING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES

Counseling may be developmental, preventive, or crisis in nature. Counselors utilizing a developmental approach recognize that human development is characterized by stages, with each stage containing a different psychosocial crisis and different developmental tasks, which must be mastered. Erik Erickson has identified nine developmental stages, commencing with infancy and progressing through to later adulthood. These stages, together with the psychosocial crisis of each stage, are as follows:

1. Infancy (0-2 years) Trust versus Mistrust
2. Toddlerhood (2-4 years) Autonomy versus Shame/Doubt
3. Early School Age (5-7 years) Initiative versus Guilt
4. Middle School Age (8-12 years) Industry versus Inferiority
5. Early Adolescence (13-17 years) Group Identity versus Alienation
6. Later Adolescence (18-22 years) Individual Identity versus Role Diffusion
7. Young Adulthood (23-30 years) Intimacy versus Isolation
8. Middle Adulthood (31-50 years) Generativity versus Stagnation
9. Later Adulthood (51 years -) Integrity versus Despair

Students enrolled in high school are predominantly in the fifth stage of development: that is, the early adolescent age. This period is characterized by rapid physical changes, significant conceptual maturity, and a heightened sensitivity to peer approval. The developmental tasks of this stage include: 1) physical maturation; 2) formal

operations; 3) membership in peer group; 4) heterosexual relationships; and 5) continual development of conscience, morality, and a set of values.

Social cooperation is now focused on the opposite sex and results in movement from the same-sex peer group to becoming increasingly sensitive to heterosexual relationships. The peer group tends to be more organized and structured than previously. The adolescent enters a more heterogeneous environment in high school; resulting in a reordering of students, changes in friendship, and a shifting of social positions. The norms of the group determine dating, behavior, and relationships to "outsiders". Adolescent peer group membership is a forerunner of adult social group membership. The adolescent begins to learn techniques for assessing the organization of social groups and his/her own position in the group.

The rate of physical maturation during adolescence is accelerated. There is maturation of the reproductive system, the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, and a redistribution of body weight. The changes associated with puberty generally peak at 11 years for females and 13 years for males. Physical maturation poses different problems for males and females. For boys, increased height and muscle mass are usually welcome changes. Boys are generally not prepared for sex changes and spontaneous ejaculation may cause puzzlement and embarrassment. For girls, the fear of obesity is heightened in a culture that values slimness. Indeed, anorexia nervosa is a condition that presently afflicts adolescent girls (in comparison with boys) at a nine-to-one ratio.

Through formal operations, the adolescent begins to think about the

world in new ways; including the ability to hypothesize about a logical sequence of events that might occur, the ability to anticipate the consequences of his/her actions, and the ability to move from "black-white" thinking to "grey" areas. Conceptual development results in a more flexible, critical, abstract view of the world and sensitivity to future concerns.

The psychosocial crisis of this period is group identity versus alienation. There is pressure from the family, peers, and the school to join groups. To the extent that the adolescent's peer group reflects the parent's values, there will be minimum conflict about friendships. The adolescent's circle of friends link him/her to a subgroup, which has continuity and meaning within the context of the neighborhood and the school. Adults in the school both passively accept and actively encourage the organization of students into peer groupings. They reinforce some characteristics of the peer group by selecting certain students for certain kinds of tasks.

The basic question for the adolescent is: "Who am I and where do I belong?" Group identity and belonging facilitates psychological growth and serves as an integrating force. Negative resolution of the psychosocial crisis results in alienation and uneasiness in the presence of peers. Self-esteem for adolescents is linked to membership and status in peer groups. Status is determined heavily by physical maturation, athletic abilities, and social skills. Variables such as social class, ethnic identity, and culture may also impact on the adolescent's self-concept.

School is important to adolescents, because it provides them with

a setting in which to interact with peers. Frequently, adolescents are placed in situations where the probability of success is minimal: adults set goals beyond reach. The school environment may be extremely competitive; resulting in failure for some students. Parents may tie success with acceptance, failure with rejection. During this stage it is essential that educators recognize individual differences: some students work in creative spurts, some require a high degree of structure while others thrive on minimal structure; some prefer to learn independently while others are motivated to learn through peer group interaction. It is important for educators to diagnose individual learning styles, and generate an educational environment that provides for varied learning styles.

The preventive approach to counseling is primarily programmatic but related to specific concerns. For example, preventive counseling might involve a high school sex education program, designed for the purpose of alleviating anxieties about sexuality and sexual relationships. Counselors work with students to help them understand themselves in relation to sexual concerns, so that they are better prepared to handle them in the future. Another programmatic approach focuses on self-awareness as it relates to future career choices and career preparation. Drug awareness, divorce, leisure time options, and communication skills are other areas that can be approached systematically by counselors.

Crisis counseling involves providing support and intervention during some crisis situation: such as loss of a parent, a family crisis involving divorce or separation, illness, pregnancy, etc.

The counselor helps the young person deal with the immediate situation and find an effective solution which will enhance overall functioning.

Research indicates that teachers refer students to counselors for the following problems:

1. Emotional problems; such as immaturity, impulsivity, moodiness, anxiety, hyperactivity, and withdrawal.
2. Intellectual deficiencies; such as inadequate ability, deficits in memory, short attention span, perceptual impairments, poor study habits, and underachievement.
3. Motivational deficits; such as lack of ambition, lack of interest, low levels of aspiration, and negative attitudes.
4. Moral deficits; such as lying, stealing, obscenity, sexual indiscretion, and underdeveloped values.
5. Physical difficulties, involving chronic illness, orthopedic handicaps, poor health habits, and psychosomatic problems.
6. Maladaptive behaviors; such as aggressive anti-social behavior, substance abuse, family conflicts, isolation and uncouth behavior (Blackham, 1977).

Hence, the role of the high school counselor is a comprehensive one; involving aiding students with their educational, career, and personal development, and helping them plan for and progress toward educational and vocational goals. School counselors work primarily with students, both individually and in groups. They also work in a consultative role with teachers, administrators, parents, and community agency personnel. Extensive use is made of school records and testing

results to help students develop their individual plans (Pietrofesa, 1978).

In order to implement this role, counselors rely on a variety of counseling approaches. There are growing numbers of theories and techniques in counseling; which differ in terms of philosophy, major personality constructs, counseling goals, the relative importance of diagnosis, counseling techniques and strategies, and targeted clientele. Frequently, school counselors employ the philosophic orientations of the counselor education programs in which they were prepared or certified.

Hollis and Wantz (1970) surveyed 475 counselor preparation institutions in the United States. Overall, they identified the philosophic orientations of counselor education programs as follows:

1. Eclectic - 24.1 percent
2. Phenomenological - 22.2 percent
3. Behavioral - 13.8 percent
4. Cognitive - 10.5 percent
5. Existential - 5.6 percent
6. Field - 5.4 percent
7. Psychosocial dynamics - 4.1 percent
8. Psychoanalytic - 4.0 percent
9. Trait-Factor - 3.9 percent
10. Transactional Analysis - 2.6 percent
11. Others - 3.8 percent

Thus, school counselors are exposed to a variety of counseling theories, with some theories and techniques emphasized to a greater

extent than others. The fundamental question in evaluating counseling effectiveness is:

> Which counseling approaches (behavioral, existential, field) are most appropriate with which types of clients (background variables, individual learning styles, personality characteristics) with what kind of problem (educational, vocational, personal, social) in what kind of setting (individual counseling, group counseling, classroom, peer helping), using what kinds of techniques/ interventions/ methods (cognitive techniques, auditory versus visual versus tactual-kinesthetic approaches, structured versus unstructured modalities)?

Traditionally, diagnosis has been viewed as an important counseling function and is defined as a summary of the counselee's problems and their causes, a description of the individual's personality dynamics, and an understanding of the individual (Shertzer and Stone, 1980). A thorough knowledge of the student's individual learning style can facilitate the diagnostic process in counseling. The Learning Style Inventory (Dunn, Dunn, and Price, 1975) has been used extensively in diagnosing individual learning styles and prescribing curricular learning interventions to respond to individual needs.

Learning style is the manner in which different elements from five basic stimuli affect a person's ability to perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. The learning style elements are as follows:

1. Environmental Stimulus: light, sound, temperature, design

2. Emotional Stimulus: structure, persistence, motivation, responsibility

3. Sociological Stimulus: pairs, peers, adults, self, group, varied

4. Physical Stimulus: perceptual strengths (auditory, visual, tactual, kinesthetic), mobility, intake, time of day

5. Psychological Stimulus: global/analytic: impulsive/reflective, cerebral dominance

A number of research studies indicate that matching teachers' teaching style to students' learning styles results in improved student achievement and attitudes. Martin (1977) found that among high school students, those high on independence (self-learners) functioned better in an alternative instructional environment, resulting in higher grades and increased satisfaction with school. Conversely, dependent students (teacher-oriented) fared better in a traditional environment. Copenhaver (1979) found that students have significantly more positive attitudes toward a subject when their learning styles are congruent with their teachers' teaching style. Cafferty (1980) determined that the greater the degree of congruence between the teachers' style and the students' style, the higher the grade-point-average of the students.

This same paradigm can be applied to counseling interventions: that is, the individual's learning style should determine the counseling techniques and strategies utilized. Learning style elements that seem to be particularly important to the counseling process are:

---High versus low need for structure

---Global versus analytic mode of processing

---Group versus individual sociological preference

---Auditory versus visual versus tactual versus kinesthetic perceptual strengths

---High versus low level of motivation

A number of counseling theorists are recognizing the importance of matching counselor style and type of counseling intervention to counselees style. The field of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) has developed around this concept. NLP is defined as "a new model of human communication and behavior that has been developed during the past four years by Richard Bandler, John Grindler, Leslie Cameron-Bandler, and Judith DeLozier. NLP was developed initially through the systematic study of Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson, Fritz Perls and other therapeutic wizards." (Bandler and Grindler, 1979, p.3). The NLP model stresses the importance of the counselor responding to the counselee's representational system, which is predominantly auditory, visual, or tactile/kinesthetic. Once the counselor has identified the student's favored system and responded out of that system, feelings of trust and rapport increase. On the other hand, if the counselor responds in a different system, the student experiences difficulty and oftentimes appears resistant to counseling (Harman and O'Neill, 1981). For example, if the student's representational system or perceptual strength is visual, the counselor might ask:

"Do you have visual images in your head as you are talking and listening to me?"

"Can you see what I am saying?"

If kinesthetic/tactile, the counselor might ask:

"Do you feel good about what you did?"

"Are you in touch with what I am saying?"

If auditory, the counselor might respond:

"I hear what you are saying."

"As you recall the conversation with your teacher, what do you hear her saying to you?"

A graphic illustration of students' varied representational systems is outlined by Grindler and Bandler (1976) as follows:

Meaning	Kinesthetic/ Tactual	Visual	Auditory
"I understand you."	"What you are saying feels right to me."	"I see what you are saying."	"I hear you clearly."
"I want to communicate something to you."	"I want you to be in touch with something."	"I want to show you something."	"I want you to listen carefully to what I say."
"Describe more of your present experience to me."	"Put me in touch with what you are feeling at this point."	"Show me a clear picture of what you see at this point."	"Tell me in more detail what you are saying at this point."

The counselor's role is to 1) respond adequately to a broad range of students' representational systems or perceptual strengths, 2) deal with incongruity of messages; for example, the student says one thing but it is not consistent with body language, and 3) help the student expand his representational system through the use of varied counseling techniques. Responding to a variety of perceptual strengths assumes that the counselor is skilled in the use of imagery, simulated counseling games, bibliotherapy (to respond to the visually-oriented student); relaxation techniques and art therapy (to respond to the tactile/kinesthetic student), as well as verbally-oriented techniques, such as rational-emotive therapy, client-centered therapy, and behavioral counseling.

Elements of learning style, which are compatible with selected counseling objectives and interventions for students at the high school level, are presented in Table 1. The objectives of counseling should be

related to the developmental tasks of early adolescence, which are listed by Havighurst (1952) as follows:

---Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.

---Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively.

---Selecting and preparing for an occupation.

---Achieving new and more mature relationships with peers of both sexes.

---Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults (detachment).

---Developing intellectual skills and competencies necessary for civic responsibility.

---Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.

---Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior.

The counseling interventions may include individual or group counseling or group guidance settings; use of programmed counseling materials and simulated games, which are compatible with students learning styles.

Longitudinal data on the Learning Style Inventory reveals some general patterns. For example, in the area of sociological stimuli, it has been established that the majority (80 percent) of gifted youth prefer learning alone, while the majority (75 percent) of culturally different youth prefer learning with peers (Griggs and Price, 1980). In the area of perceptual strengths, girls tend to have stronger auditory preferences while boys tend to have stronger visual preferences.

In addition to developing a counseling program that is responsive to individual learning styles, the school counselor should function as a consultant to teachers, parents, and administrators

regarding learning styles. The counselor works with teachers to assess individual learning styles and to interpret student needs, based on learning style differences. In the area of curriculum and teaching, contract activity packages are used as one of the basic methods of individualizing instruction. The contract activity package is an individualized educational plan that facilitates learning because it includes the following elements:

1. Simply stated objectives that itemize exactly what the student is required to learn.
2. Multisensory resources that teach the information that the objectives indicate must be mastered.
3. A series of activities through which the information that has been mastered is used in a creative way.
4. A series of alternative ways in which creative activities developed by one student may be shared with classmates.
5. At least three small-group techniques.
6. A pretest, a self-test, and a posttest to assess the achievement of objectives (Dunn and Dunn, 1978).

The counselor can work with classroom teachers to help them develop strategies in addition to the predominant lecture-discussion model of instruction.

Increasingly, school counselors are involving the parents of adolescents in the counseling program. Hansen and Stevic (1969) enumerate some parental concerns about the adolescent including:

---The level of his educational progress.

---The potential he possesses.

---The degree of participation and cooperation he exhibits.

---The status of his peer relationships.

---Any special abilities or disabilities observed.

---The discrepancy between their expectations for him and his actual achievement.

---The discrepancy between their values and those espoused within the school.

---Advice that may help them in problems such as adolescent substance abuse.

Through adolescent-study groups, the counselor can help parents understand the individual learning style of their youth and make provisions for learning style by creating a home-study environment that is supportive.

Finally, the school counselor works with the school administrators to develop counseling programs that are responsive to student needs. This approach assumes that individual learning styles will be assessed and that instructional and counseling interventions will be designed that are compatible with the various learning styles (Griggs, 1981).

In conclusion, a thorough knowledge of students' individual learning styles can help counselors develop strategies, techniques, and programs, in consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators, that are responsive to individual needs.

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Table 1

Learning Style Elements Compatible With Selected Counseling Objectives and Interventions

Objective in Counseling	Counseling Intervention	Compatible Learning Style Elements
1. To help senior high school students learn decision-making skills.	Conduct small group counseling sessions for 11th grade students, focused on college decision-making and choice.	Sociological elements: high need for peer involvement and low need for self (independent) learning.
2. To help students develop more effective communication skills.	Use filmstrips: 1) "Now Hear This! Becoming A Better Listener." 2) Adolescent Conflict: Parents vs. Teens" in group guidance classes and follow-up with discussion.	Physical elements: high visual perceptual strength.
3. To help students learn assertive skills and resist pressure from others to do things that conflict with their own value system.	Through the use of bibliotherapy work with students individually to help them read in the area of assertiveness i.e. Asserting Yourself: A Practical Guide for Positive Change by Sharon Bower and Gordon Bower.	Emotional elements: high motivation and responsibility. Sociological elements: high need for self learning.
4. To help students identify ways in which substance abuse can affect relationships.	Present situations in which substance abuse can affect the relationship between individuals. Have students role-play the situations. Have the class focus on problems created by substance abuse & discuss possible alternatives.	Physical elements: high kinesthetic perceptual strength. Emotional elements: low need for structure
5. To help students deal with stress more effectively by learning relaxation techniques.	During group counseling sessions, introduce imagery and relaxation exercises as techniques for relaxing.	Compatible Learning Style Elements Physical elements: high visual and kinesthetic perceptual strengths. Psychological elements: global orientation; right cerebral dominance
6. Through self-enhancing education (Randolph and Howe, 1973) focus on how to relate and transact with self and others effectively.	In individual counseling, introduce the program, which involves problem-solving, self-control and self-direction. Developed particularly for underachieving and alienated youth.	Emotional elements: [illegible]ed for the unmotivated, irresponsible, and youth with short attention spans. Sociological elements: Self and adult. Physical elements: Individual counseling can be scheduled during the time of day preferred by the student